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RUEHXK/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE

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TAGS: PREL IS VT

SUBJECT: HOLY SEE COMMENTS ON ISRAELI/PALESTINIAN CONFERENCE,
FUNDAMENTAL AGREEMENT

REF: (A) MARTIN-LARREA MARCH 27 EMAIL, (B) MARTIN-LARREA MARCH 29 EMAIL

CLASSIFIED BY: Christopher Sandrolini, Deputy Chief of Mission,
EXEC, State.

REASON: 1.4 (d)

¶1. (C) Summary. Ambassador and DCM discussed the Holy See-Israel Fundamental Agreement during a meeting with Holy See deputy FM Parolin, and also discussed the Holy See's participation in a recent UN event in Rome addressing Palestinian rights. Parolin said the recently postponed plenary session of the FA would likely be rescheduled in May, and that the Holy See hopes for progress at that time; everything depends on political will in Israel. Holy See negotiator David Jaeger still hopes to travel to Israel in April to work on a legal issue of particular importance to the Fundamental Agreement. Concerning the rights conference, Parolin sought further information about the USG stance on the sponsoring UN organization. End summary.

¶2. (U) See action request para 8.

Fundamental Agreement

¶3. (C) During an April 3 call on Monsignor Pietro Parolin, the Holy See's Undersecretary for Relations with States (i.e., deputy foreign minister), Ambassador asked Parolin how soon the postponed plenary session of negotiations on the Fundamental Agreement (ref a) might be rescheduled. Parolin said the Holy See could not reschedule in April due to prior commitments including Holy Week observances and obligations of some essential participants. He expected the session to be rescheduled in early May (ref b).

¶4. (C) Parolin noted that while the Holy See had not been happy about the last-minute postponement, it had nevertheless accepted the Israeli explanation. The Vatican quickly issued a statement to this effect, in order to forestall negative press reports (ref b).

¶5. (C) Ambassador told Parolin that senior USG officials had weighed in twice in recent days with high-ranking Israeli officials to encourage them to move forward with the Fundamental Agreement (FA). Parolin appreciated this support and said the Holy See considers the matter to be fundamentally one of political will by the Israelis. If that will is present, the plenary session can help resolve outstanding issues; if not, technical questions will continue to obstruct progress indefinitely. For the moment, Parolin expressed cautious hope.

¶6. (C) Separately, Holy See negotiator Father David Jaeger told us April 4 that he had not yet scheduled travel to Israel, but hoped that the GOI would make good on its offer for experts to meet with him before May to work on a legal issue of particular importance to the FA (ref b). Jaeger told us previously that he and his counterparts had worked out a formula for the

adjudication of Holy See claims covered by the FA, only to see it rejected by GOI officials just before they cancelled the March plenary session. (In fact, some Vatican officials suspect that this issue played a role in the cancellation.) Jaeger hopes to hear from the Israelis after Passover.

Palestinian Conference

¶ 7. (C) At an earlier meeting, Parolin had asked DCM about US non-participation in a March 22-23 conference in Rome sponsored by the UN Committee for the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. Parolin had represented the Holy See at the event and delivered remarks, citing those made in January by Pope Benedict XVI, on the right of Palestinians and Israelis "to live in peace in their own state" and on the vital role of Christians in the Middle East. DCM relayed to Parolin that the US had avoided the event on several grounds, including the linkage of one speaker to a proscribed organization and the overall US view that the Committee is outdated and biased. Parolin asked that the US take note that the Holy See had sought to make the event more balanced, and requested more detailed information from the US as to its stance on the Committee. Parolin also noted that he had been careful to speak at an opening meeting during the session on inter-religious dialogue. He expressed surprise that the event had not received much attention in the press.

¶ 8. (C) Post would appreciate further guidance from Department concerning this Committee, which we could pass on to the Holy See per Parolin's request.

ROONEY